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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of the student and states that it is not sufficient to conceive of the student's role as only a response to conditions set by the instructor's role. Part 1 of this paper discusses the relationship between the instructor's role and the student's role in a college program. It states that the role of the student is to learn from that which is offered, and that in a person-centered program the learning which is valued (1) is lasting rather than short-range, (2) involves process more than content, and (3) contains more personal elaborations than pieces of information. In part 2, the role of the child in the open classroom is explored, while part 3 shows the parallels between roles in an open classroom and roles in a person-centered college program. Part 4 contains practical suggestions for college instructors who wish to pay greater attention to the role of the student. Finally, part 5 contains practical suggestions for the student to construct his/her own role as a learner. (RC)

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*Project Change*

# The Role Of The Student In A Person-Centered Program

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# THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT IN A PERSON-CENTERED PROGRAM

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore virtually uncharted territory in education: the role of the student. The role of the instructor is discussed here only insofar as it relates to the student's role.

If you think that's a one-sided emphasis, you're right. But I have what I regard as a good reason for highlighting the student's role. Fashioning a person-centered approach to teacher education has for me, until recently, meant spending most of my professional time attending to my role as instructor. I have worked out the diversity of this role in practice, talked out its ramifications in philosophy, read about its possibilities in current professional literature. In so doing I have been guilty, in Piaget's terms, of "failure to decenter." In focusing so intently on my responsibilities as a teacher, I have neglected something which is absolutely fundamental in any learning situation: the role and responsibilities of the student. I am now learning that the quality of a course experience, for individuals and the group, is greatly affected by how well I have communicated--and how well the students have internalized--what their role is.

No one would dispute that students have an active and important role to play in any program that is centered on supporting the development of the individual person. But compare the paucity of what has been written about the student's role in a person-centered program with the wealth of written wisdom about the role of the teacher.

What accounts for this curious discrepancy? Why does the literature of open education, ostensibly student-centered, have next to nothing to say about the role of the student? Granted, much has been written about children's activities in an informal classroom. It cannot be assumed, however, that learning automatically accompanies overt activity. Other writings (e.g., Blitz, 1973; Brearly, 1970) describe how to develop a truly child-centered curriculum, one that is organized around children's needs and interests. But my experience with courses for teachers has taught me that while it's important to provide opportunities for active experiences center on learner interests and needs, it is not enough.

It is simply not sufficient to conceive the student's role as only a response to conditions set by the role the instructor assumes. To say to a student, "Here are the options; you decide among them or devise a meaningful alternative" is not enough. To present students with a set of flexible course requirements that they can tailor to individual situations and needs is not enough. Having regular course evaluations to get feedback on student needs and course quality is not enough. No matter how much or which kinds of assistance to learning the instructor gives, it is not enough in itself.

Why not? What would be enough? To those difficult questions the next five sections of the paper are addressed. Each raises a distinct issue and offers a different perspective on understanding and developing the role of the student.

Scope of the Paper: Five Issues

The first part of this essay will come directly from my experience as a college instructor with Project Change, an evolving person-centered graduate program for teachers of preschool and elementary school children. My question here is, What are the points of contact, the interrelationships, between the instructor's role and the student's role in a college program?

The second section asks, What is the role of the child in an open[1] classroom? Answering this question leads directly to another: What are the implications of the child's role in a classroom for the role of the adult learner in a college program? Where are there parallels between the learning and development of children and the learning and development of teachers? Where does the translation from "child" to "teacher" become less direct, requiring adaptation and imagination? The third section begins with an exploration of possible answers to those questions.

It is at that point in the paper where the role of the instructor needs to be brought into the discussion. The latter half of section three asks, What are the parallels between the role of a classroom teacher and the role of a college instructor? What are the teaching responsibilities that encourage learners to assume the responsibilities of their role?

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[1]"Open" is the term usually applied to education at the elementary level that is supportive of all aspects of individual learning and development. "Person-centered" is the term used in this paper to describe education at the college level that is supportive of all aspects of individual learning and development. Philosophically, the two terms are interchangeable.

The last two sections are practical. The fourth suggests direct actions an instructor can and should take to help students become more aware of the nature and importance of their role. The concluding section suggests direct actions students can take to bring their role as learners into its fullest being.

## I. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INSTRUCTOR'S ROLE AND THE STUDENT'S ROLE IN A COLLEGE PROGRAM

There is a basic dichotomy inherent in the teaching/learning relationship. The purpose of teaching is to help people learn. In my role as instructor I could do everything I know how to teach, and the learning that actually occurred would still be the exclusive province of the student. (I can teach you; I cannot "learn" **you**.) It is very important to make this distinction. Changing teaching behavior will not automatically change the kind and quality of the learning. It will change only the teaching--the extent to which people are helped to learn. Changes in the kind and quality of learning are dependent upon changes in the learning behavior.

Last semester I tried changing my approach to reading assignments in one graduate course on early childhood curriculum. Rather than using bibliographies or a text, I decided to use three outstanding articles (by David Hawkins, 1970) highlighting the interactive relationship among the teacher, the child, and the materials, to be read and re-read at different points during the course. It was a direct attempt to help people read with more maturity--to get more depth, more personal meaning, and to become more open to the learning that can come from reading. Most teachers in the course found the approach, in a word, repetitive. Why? There had been no change in the learning approach to correspond with the change in the teaching approach. They had used the same approach to "learning from reading" that they would have used with a text or bibliography; they read the articles for immediate meaning the first time, and did not upon re-reading try to find new insights, new connections, and changes in their reactions. Knowing now that the dichotomy of the teaching/learning situation can influence expected outcomes, I'll be paying more attention to the learner's perspective each time I try out a change in teaching.

Teaching and learning also involve a basic reciprocity. Every action I take to teach implies some action I am expecting from the students to learn. If I provide math materials, I am expecting students to act upon mathematics and/or engage in a mathematical process through their use. If I have discussions, I am expecting students to be actively engaged with their thoughts and the thoughts of others.

Likewise, the paths of learning that students choose help define my role as instructor. For example, the majority of teachers in my graduate-level math course this spring chose to attend all of the workshops I had scheduled as an option to personal exploration of materials. When I attempted to discourage workshop attendance in

favor of more independent learning, people let me know that the workshops were much more helpful to their learning than the times they had spent on their own with materials. I could have responded in two ways: (1) provide more workshops, (2) provide more help for independent learning. Either way, their learning helped to define my teaching. (In this case, I chose to provide more help for independent learning.)

Do these reflections shed any light on the role of the student? They might, if we take them a step further. Let's assume that a person-centered approach recognizes, for example, that mathematics per se cannot be directly taught. Rather, people can only be helped to learn about math. Help from an instructor takes the form of providing certain kinds of methods and materials: group play with geoboards, time to mess about with wood scraps for small construction, discussions on curriculum and planning, etc. A fundamental conclusion follows: the role of the student is to learn from that which is offered.

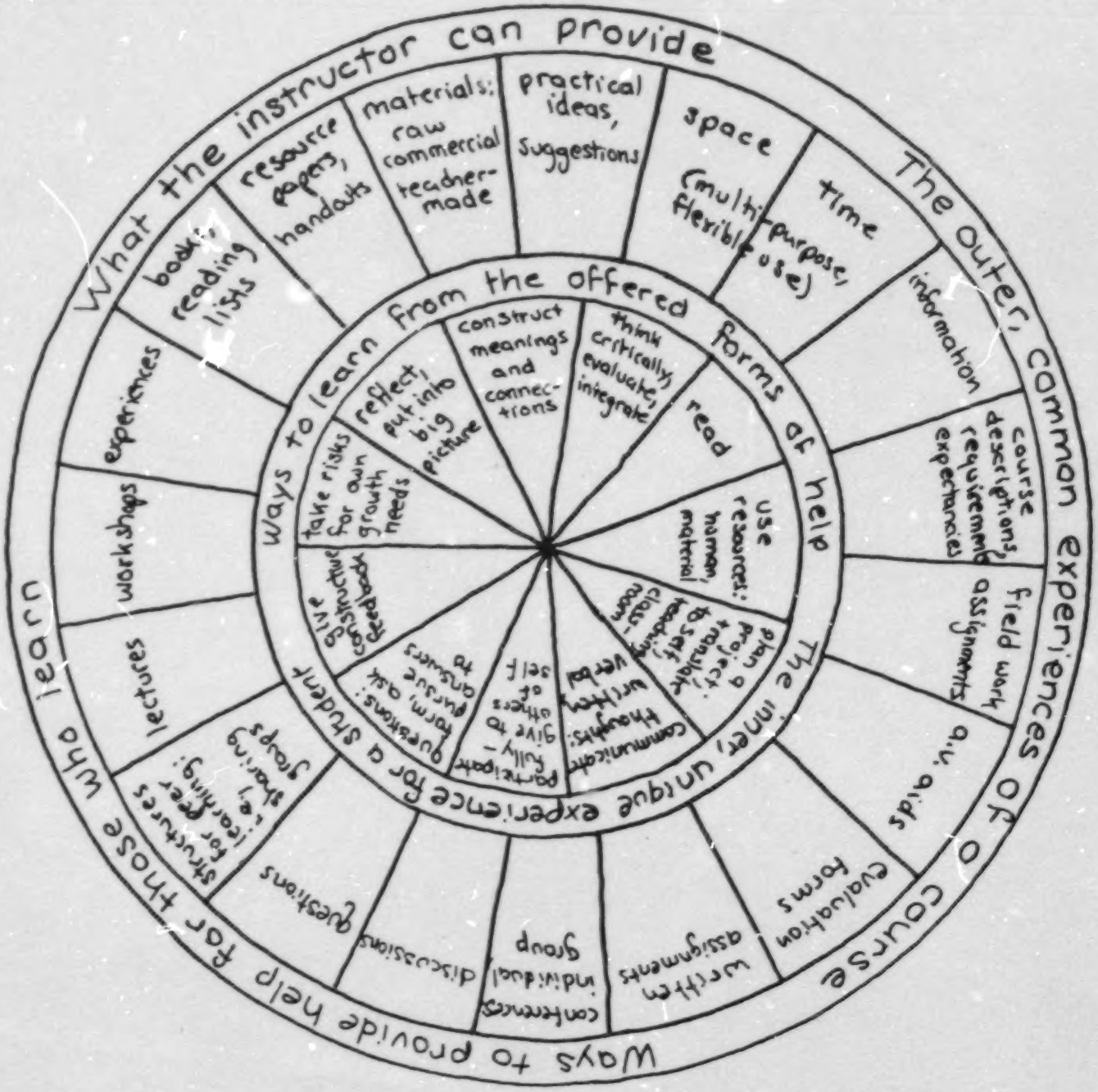
A simple illustration of the relationship between the instructor's providing and the student's learning is the lecture. A lecture can be given directly to the students by the instructor. That might be seen as providing one form of help. To offer even more help, the instructor might also provide time for questions-and-answers during the lecture, provide some follow-up materials or demonstrations to illustrate points made in the lecture, and provide some guidelines for small group discussions on the lecture. But what is learned from the lecture, the questions and discussion, and the materials and demonstrations cannot be "provided." Any learning that results from those forms of help has to be constructed by the student. Learning depends on the student's personal, self-determined interaction with the ideas and the experiences.

The diagram which follows is a symbolic representation of the relationship between the instructor's role and the student's role in a college program. As a prefatory note, let me emphasize that the teaching/learning process is a highly interactive one. The separation of roles is not as distinct in real situations as this discussion and the diagram would seem to indicate. But the distinction is helpful when making a conscious effort to better understand the relationship.

The outer circle suggests some things that an instructor can provide to help students learn. The inner circle suggests what might be done by a student to learn, having been offered those forms of help. The lists are not exhaustive--I have selected from my own experiences as an instructor.

Pause a moment to consider some implications of the wheel. The outer circle really describes the outer experiences. They are some of the obvious elements of a teaching/learning situation, and could be provided by the instructor for either individuals or the group. I characterize these elements as the "common experience." When some-

INSTRUCTOR/STUDENT ROLE WHEEL



one asks me or a student to describe a course, the parts of the outer circle are what we are likely to name.

The inner circle, on the other hand, describes the inner experience. The student has to use these processes in order to construct his/her own learning, and give it coherence and personal meaning. They cannot be provided by the instructor; they have to be provided by the student. I would characterize these as the "unique experience." We would be likely to refer to the parts of the inner circle when describing the individual student's participation in a course.

Would the roles of teacher and learner be any different if a program were not person-centered? Oh, yes! First of all, the person-centered approach requires an instructor to decenter--to pay less and less attention to what s/he thinks s/he is teaching and more and more attention to what students are actually learning. No matter how well the role of the instructor is understood and implemented, it will get nowhere without a comparable measure of real and active involvement on the part of students. The outer circle needs the inner circle. What is taught cannot be learned otherwise.

In turn, the nature of the program dictates the nature of the learning to be prized. In a person-centered program, the learning which is valued is lasting rather than short-range, process more than content, and contains more personal elaborations than pieces of information. The inner circle needs the provisions of the outer circle.

## II. THE ROLE OF THE CHILD IN THE OPEN CLASSROOM

Little has been written of the child's role in the open classroom. I could locate only two sources that provided specific ideas. Vincent Rogers' (1970) Teaching in the British Primary School, has a chapter by Marie Muir entitled, "How Children Take Responsibility for Their Own Learning." And Hassett and Weisberg's (1972) Open Education: Alternatives Within Our Tradition, includes a chapter on "The Role of the Child." You may wish to read these yourself for greater detail. The major points will be summarized here to provide a source of possible parallels between the role of the child as a learner and the role of the college student in a person-centered program.

At the center of the role of any student is the art of learning. Hassett and Weisberg state firmly, "The child's fundamental role is to learn and to learn how to learn." Muir describes the art of learning as taking responsibility for (1) what to learn, (2) how to learn, and (3) when to learn.

Being responsible for what to learn requires having opportunities to choose. The open classroom has a diversity of materials and activities to encourage choice in what to learn. Simply making choices, however, will not insure learning. "Before you can be responsible for something, you have to become aware of its nature and understand

it. Children take time to become aware of 'learning' as a conscious pursuit" (Muir, 1970).

When I was teaching a multi-aged open classroom (ages 6-9), I always had a "together time" after a block of free choice time. The purpose of the discussion at these sessions was to help children become conscious of their learning. It was easy for a child to tell what he had chosen, or what the nature of his activity had been. It was more difficult for a child to respond to: "Tell us about an idea you had as you were working on that." "Can you tell us something you learned?" "Was there a question you thought of and then tried to answer?" I recall that it was well into November before the children had a keen awareness of their learning.[2]

In exercising responsibility for what to learn, children also need frequent consultation with the teacher. This is an example of the highly interactive relationship between the role of the learner and the role of the teacher. Consultation with young children can take place informally as a teacher moves about the classroom, observing and listening to difficulties and offering possible solutions. Common difficulties are often spotted in this way, leading to some small group instruction to meet those needs.

With older children, the consultation and decision-making can be more formal. If a group of children propose to study "famous explorers," for example, the teacher may ask them to decide first if the topic is too wide or wide enough to be worth pursuing in the time available. (Let's look through some books and make a list of explorer's names. Would you like to choose 5, or work on just American explorers, or work on those who discovered new land?) Secondly, each member of the group might be asked to prepare suggestions for what the investigation could include (map-making, museum visit, weapons construction, creative drama, scale model building, etc.). Third, from the compiled list of suggestions, useful and interesting aspects to study need to be selected and agreed upon. Which ones are feasible? How long will they take? Where in the study--beginning, middle, or end--should related experiences occur? What sources of information could be utilized? How will the work be organized? All these are topics for joint consultation.

Taking responsibility for <u>how</u> to learn also has a prerequisite. It requires that the child understand that all things to be learned cannot be acquired through trial and error. "It takes quite a long time for most primary school children to understand... that some kinds of learning do not suddenly reveal themsleves...that effort and practice are required from them and sometimes help from teachers. Only as they begin to realize this does how to learn become a meaningful problem" (Muir, 1970). Learning to read could be a prime occasion

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[2] For another discussion of this issue, write for: "The Celebration of Learning," by Susan Dalziel. <u>Project Change Mini-Book</u>: Feb., 1975; Vol. 3, No. 1.

for most children to come to this realization. It's unfortunate that most teachers do not focus children's attention on the underlying elements of effort and practice required in learning to read, or on the variety of "how to's" employed in the process: in short, on learning how to learn.

Deciding when to learn is a responsibility that can be exercised only in an environment where choosing not to learn is an option. "Learning" or "not learning" depends on how the child defines each situation at a given moment. One child gazing out the window may be mentally composing a story about the squirrel he observes there; another may be wondering when it will be time for lunch. The quiet corners and private spaces usually present in open classrooms are manifestations of the recognition that children cannot maintain peak interest in learning all day every day. Children have a right to set the tempo of their own activity--which includes taking responsibility for when to learn.

Throughout this discussion of the child's role in the open classroom, I intend "learning" to encompass all phases of growth and development--cognitive, psychomotor, emotional, and social. Within each of these areas, there are many aspects that need attention. Social learning, for example, includes developing self-discipline, cooperative skills, and respect for persons. Learning, indeed, has many facets.

## III. PARALLELS BETWEEN ROLES IN AN OPEN CLASSROOM AND ROLES IN A PERSON-CENTERED COLLEGE PROGRAM

### Implications of the Child's Role for the Role of the Adult Learner

I have come to three conclusions about adult learning in a person-centered program as a result of studying the role of the child in the open classroom: (1) the role of the adult learner is to take responsibility for your own learning, (2) being responsible for your own learning as an adult means taking responsibility for what to learn (which includes opportunities for choice, awareness of the nature of learning, and frequent consultation), how to learn, and, to a lesser extent, when to learn, and (3) the learner can perform his/her role best when the teacher's role is performed most effectively (Hassett and Weisberg, 1972). Let me speak first about conclusions (1) and (2).

A person-centered approach to graduate education consistently offers opportunities for choice in what to learn. To quote from a description of my course on curriculum development for teachers:

> The focus of this course is the development of some aspect of your curriculum. In most cases that takes the form of selecting and designing learning experiences and materials that match some aspect of your curriculum that you would like to enrich or make more child-centered. In some cases it could mean actually designing a space, an environment within which those activities take place....

This choice in course project may be coupled with choice of materials and activities to pursue during class time. But, as is the case with children, simply choosing will not assure learning for adults. A sixth grade teacher in my course on early childhood mathematics last semester confessed that he'd had a good time choosing from and playing with different math materials, but shaid he hadn't learned anything from that activity.

If the opportunity to choose does not help the adult take responsibility for what to learn, it may be that other conditions necessary for responsibility are missing. The learner should, first of all, have a familiarity with the nature of learning. Adults, like children, may need time and experiences to become aware of what is involved in learning--to understand that some kinds of learning do not suddenly reveal themselves. During an initial session on Piaget in our "Institute in Personal Learning and Classroom Development" this past summer, one of my colleagues created a good deal of student disequilibrium by asking them to break into small groups to discuss what in Piaget's work could be considered "theory," what "fact," and how they could distinguish between the two. The reactions: How can we do that? You're the one who knows about Piaget! What are we supposed to learn from each other when we're all equally ignorant? Reflecting on the incident in a subsequent evaluation session, one student said, "I didn't enjoy it...it made me think hard." Another said it was a good idea to ask people to think critically, but suggested it would be so much more efficient ("I would learn so much more") if the material on Piaget were simply presented in lecture form.

This example serves to highlight several erroneous assumptions about learning. One is that being uncomfortable in a learning situation means that you are not learning. Quite the contrary is more accurate--the right amount of disequilibrium is a catalyst for learning. The request for Piaget lectures may have been based on the assumption that a lecture would make learning suddenly occur. The occurrence of learning is due to a process within the learner's mind--not due to some outside words or events being pasted onto the mind. And finally, the above example assumes that immediate learning--that which the learner can state right away--is the best measure of the value of a learning experience. In fact, immediate learning may be temporary and of little value. A person-centered program prizes lasting, process-oriented, personally constructed and elaborated learning. That kind takes longer, is more difficult, and requires considerable reflection from the student on the very nature of learning.

The third condition necessary for an adult to take full responsibility for what to learn is the use of frequent consultation. The fellow who stated that he didn't learn anything from playing with math materials might have benefited from a conference at the beginning of each class to help him decide upon the content and purpose of his activity: "Why have you chosen this material? Tell me some ideas you have about working with it. Will you use the material to demonstrate some mathematical principle, or to discover one?"

For an adult, as for a child, the easy part is choosing and doing an activity: it is far more difficult to focus on the learning involved. It is also known that too many questions can inhibit learning. So can too few. Consultation is a delicate art--enhancing learning by asking just enough questions at just the right time.

The difference between the child learner and the adult learner with regard to consultation, is that the adult learner can more readily assume responsibility for initiating consultation. Adult learners seem better able than children to identify their needs in a teaching/learning situation. It could be said that the role of the college student is to seek out consultation with the instructor as the need for it is felt.

Taking responsibility for how to learn has two aspects in a person-centered college program. The first is how to learn about something of interest: moral development, the Cuisenaire Rods, record-keeping in an open classroom, the language experience approach to reading, and so on. The second is how to learn from a given teaching/learning situation: lecture, workshop, use of materials, peer interaction, independent investigation, and so on.

In the first instance, the student would have already gone through the process of carving out what to learn, and needs to extend that with further questions and decisions. Where could I find resources? Which kinds of resources would provide the most help? What can I do on my own, and what will I need help with? What's a logical sequence for the investigation? Is there a practical aspect I could try out? How will I organize and present my learning?

The second aspect of how to learn, learning from a given teaching/learning situation, is one of the more difficult roles for students to assume. Part of the difficulty stems from unfulfilled expectations; part stems from past experience.

This past summer our students came to the Institute expecting to have plenty of time to make classroom materials. Instead, much of their time was devoted to activities in interest centers for learning on an adult level (e.g., making a wood sculpture); materials-making had been scheduled for an extra day in the week. By the end of the summer, a few people were still equating "opportunities for making materials" with "worthwhile learning experience." Since they weren't satisfied with the opportunities for making things, they weren't satisfied with their learning. Others were able to revise their expectations and define a worthwhile learning experience in terms of what was actually happening. In taking responsibility for how to learn, part of the student's role is to be flexible--able and willing to revise expectations and mine an experience for all the learning it can yield.

Past experience can be an influence, too. If a teacher in a course has used attribute blocks only to help the children in her classroom learn, she may find it hard to shed the role of teacher and discover how to learn from the attribute blocks as an adult. If all of a student's previous graduate courses have been taught by the talk 'n' chalk method, she may not know how to learn from a workshop. That works the other way, too. When college students are used to learning in a person-centered course, they may have trouble in learning from a content-centered or teacher-centered course (much like the 1st grader who after a year in an informal classroom encounters a very traditional one). If we believe, however, that any teaching/learning situation holds the potential for worthwhile learning, the learner has an obligation--a moral obligation, really--to try to discover how to learn from it. "The difficult, after all, is not the impossible" (Louis J. Rubin, 1973). As one student said, "Even in the very worst courses I've taken, I've developed new insights, new ways of looking at things, new integrations. You don't have to have a great instructor, or even a good one, in order to do that."

The choice of when to learn is not a very real choice for graduate students. They are socked into a course that meets at a set time, for a prescribed amount of time--whether or not they are tired, ill, or uninterested that day in learning. In general, that time is viewed by those in our graduate program at Project Change as time set aside from their busy teaching schedules to learn.

Project Change has created some innovations within the standard time framework: (1) a Saturday course that schedules 15 sessions in the on-campus Teacher Resource Center; the teachers in the course attend any 10 workshops of their choice, (2) a Summer Institute that meets from 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Monday through Thursday, for five weeks, (3) a Fall Institute that meets for 5 hours, one night a week, for a semester, and (4) a field-based course that takes place in an area school and designs class time to include day-long visits by the instructor to the school as a consultant, or ½-day workshops by the instructor.[3] Each of these innovations leaves room for collaborative planning among students and the instructor regarding the use of time. If these changes more closely approximate the time framework of an open classroom--and I feel they do--then the choice of when to learn has become more real for our graduate students. The student's role in assuming responsibility for when to learn in these situations is to contribute to discussions and decisions about the use of time.

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[3]For more information about these innovations and other aspects of Project Change's approach to teacher education, write for Project Change: Progress Toward Objectives in Teacher Education, 1974-1975, by Thomas Lickona.

Implications of the Teacher's Role in an Open Classroom for the Instructor's Role in a College Program

When the teacher's role is effectively performed, the learner has the greatest chance of performing his/her role fully. What are the responsibilities of the teacher's role that contribute to learner effectiveness? Muir (1970) describes three:

1. "...teachers must retain responsibility for determining the areas within which children's (student's) decisions are desirable and effective." One of the goals of our Summer Institute, for example, is to have people experience an in-depth learning situation--to choose an area of interest and explore it as fully as time and resources will allow. But we had some students say that they would prefer a smorgasbord appraoch: "Couldn't we divide our time among all of the interest areas? I don't want to miss out on anything!" The staff felt that a wholesale accommodation to that request would be neither desirable nor effective in light of our goal of in-depth involvement. Instead, an occasional block of time was opened for students to go to other interest areas, and some common experiences among interest areas were planned.

2. "Sometimes, too, teachers need to make it clear that those who teach (as well as those who learn) need to establish certain conditions, if their work is to be productive." Some of these conditions are organizational (managerial?); for example, the need for care to be taken with materials and other resources. Some of those conditions are professional. I do not feel productive, for example, when I give one-shot workshops or seminars. I need a certain amount of continuity with the people, processes, and ideas involved in a course. If someone asks me to do a workshop on record-keeping in my math course, I have to either find a way to relate it to the continuity of other ideas we've been working on, or suggest some ways I could meet that need individually.

3. "...a teacher's responsibility lies in trying to ensure that the choice of what to learn is offered to children (students) in the context of that which is likely to be of enduring rather than ephemeral value..." Sometimes it's hard to get a consensus on what is enduring and what is ephemeral. A student in one of my courses wanted to spend all of her class time making materials for her classroom. That may have been a wise use of some of her time; I wasn't so sure of the lasting value of spending all of her time that way. This past summer one of my students asked me if we would be learning some quick and easy ways of setting up displays in the classroom. I said no, but we would be spending a couple of days developing our own displays. The latter approach seemed to me to hold much more potential for personal learning that could be of enduring value.

In addition to these three responsibilities of the teacher, we can draw some implications for effective teaching directly from the role of the student. To help students take responsibility for their learning, the instructor needs to (1) provide opportunities for choice--in what to learn, how to learn, and, where possible, when to learn, (2) provide opportunities for students to talk and think about the nature of learning--to become aware of and familiar with how it happens, how it feels, what effect it has, (3) provide the time and the vehicle for frequent consultation with students in order to engage students in active decision-making about the content, purpose, and process of their learning, and (4) make all of the above an integral part of courses, giving these responsibilities substantial attention.

## IV. FURTHER PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS

If you are a college instructor, you can take some or all of the following steps to pay greater attention to the role of students in the courses you teach.

You can begin by sharing with students what's been written about their role. Hand out this paper, or one you've written to express your thoughts on the issue. One of my colleagues, for example, is preparing a "letter to students" to be handed out in the first session of his course. In it he will describe some of the ways in which students can take responsibility for their own learning during the course: e.g., defining what they want to learn from the course experience, deciding what to learn about in relation to their own teaching, classroom, and curriculum; arranging for a consultation with the instructor to discuss their decisions about what to learn.

You can also make available the previously discussed chapters in Rogers (1970) and Hassett and Weisberg (1972). Ask students to try substituting the words "adult," "instructor," and "college course" for "child," "teacher," and "classroom" as they read.

A practical follow-up would be to provide time for your students to react to what they read. Have group discussions on the role of the student. Find out what their reactions are to the ideas they've encountered; what are their thoughts on the issue? One of the best ways to clarify thinking is to try to express your thoughts clearly to someone else. To quote one of my students who read this paper, "The role of the instructor is to initiate a dialogue in which each student can begin to stretch and change his/her conception of his/her role" (Fortess, 1975).

The previously discussed role wheel might stimulate some discussions. Starting with a blank wheel, the instructor could describe plans and goals for the next few weeks of the course, for example: "During the next 4 weeks we will be exploring the topics of number, measurement, space, and logical thinking, in order to begin planning

a balanced math curriculum." The instructor could then fill in some of the spaces in the outer wheel with what s/he will be providing to help students learn: a display of logical thinking games, a workshop on measurment, an interest area on number operations, specific books and papers, etc. Then ask students to project what their role will involve during the coming four weeks--what will be needed in the inner circle of the wheel? I would suggest leaving some blank spaces in the wheel for reciprocal suggestions.

And finally, readings, discussions, and reactions need to be acted upon. One way instructors can help students act upon ideas about their role is to design an open-ended learning contract. This contact would help each student define how to take responsibility for what to learn and how to learn.[4]

Students often ask for examples of other student's work. It helps them understand in concrete terms what the course requirements entail. Lately our staff has discussed the value of sharing a variety of previous students' work, making copies of exemplary papers available. Rather than focusing on the content of student papers, we would use them as a basis for examining the role of the student. In what ways did the author of a project take active responsibility for learning? What aspects of their role do you think they understood and fulfilled? These questions could be another way of helping students to act upon ideas about their role.

Structures for sharing can also highlight the role of the student. As Muir (1970) has said, "...One of the greatest inducements toward taking a responsible attitude toward your own learning is to be in a position of being responsible for what someone else learns from you." Like other structures in our person-centered approach at Cortland, the ones designed to help people teach others have had to undergo constant refinement. Students have to feel that sharing is genuinely growth-producing--not just a repetition of those horrible fourth-grade experiences with social studies units.

One of the best structures for sharing I've found is small-group planning. The small group is collectively responsible for gathering information on a topic, for selecting what to present to the class, and for deciding how to present (truly teach) that which they have selected. Members of the small group are then individually responsible for such things as preparing a handout, setting up a display, planning and carrying out a class activity, and making or gathering any materials that will be needed.

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[4]For more information on open-ended learning contracts, see Carl Rogers (1969), Freedom to Learn, p. 133; or Barbara Blitz (1973), The Open Classroom: Making It Work, p. 91.

I have suggested here what seems to me to be a logical sequence of steps for instructors who wish to pay greater attention to the role of the student: (1) share information and questions about the student's role, (2) have students react to the information, and (3) act upon the information and reactions to it. Is this some kind of agreed-upon formula for success? No. Until we have had experiences with some of these ideas in courses we teach, three open questions remain. First of all, When is the optimum time to initiate discussions on the role of the student? Is it during the first class meeting? Is it after you've had some time to establish the environment for teaching and learning, the human climate of interaction? Secondly, How do you begin? What kinds of experiences are thought-provoking introductions to the role of the student? And finally, Where and how far do you take it from there? What is "enough attention" to the role of the student on the part of the instructor?

My best suggestion is simply to begin. The answers we seek will emerge from experience.

## V. FURTHER PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

If you are a student in a college program, the following suggestions may help you construct your own role as a learner.

In any learning situation, try beginning with some personal reflection. What do I want to get out of this experience? What am I going to do to insure that that's what I get? As Dewey said, "A well-posed question is half the answer" (quoted in Rubin, 1973).

To reduce the natural discomfort one feels in any new learning situation, you might put your role on paper. List the situations for the course (reading, workshops, classroom application, etc.), the instructor's responsibilities in each, and your responsibilities in each. This can be done right at the beginning of a course, as soon as you get a course description. Last semester, some students in my mathematics course did this in a small group. Here are two samples from the list they made.

| THE SITUATION: what the instructor has chosen to do to "teach" the subject | INSTRUCTOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES: what to do to help people learn from the situation | STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES: what to do to learn from the situation |
|---|---|---|
| 1. experiences: ex.--class activity to build a tall construction with straws and tape | 1a. pay attention to the classroom climate | 1a. participate |
| | 1b. make the intent clear | 1b. contribute to the experience: bring in objects, experiences, questions |
| | 1c. provide materials | 1c. be willing to take risks |
| | 1d. provided direction | 1d. be open, flexible |
| | 1e. be prepared | 1e. react |
| | | 1f. prepare |
| 2. discussions: ex.--using math texts in an experienced-based program | 2a. moderate | 2a. participate |
| | 2b. keep on impersonal level | 2b. question |
| | 2c. know the topic | 2c. listen |
| | 2d. think of questions | 2d. appreciate |
| | 2e. add/contribute to | 2e. speak concisely |
| | 2f. maintain control | 2f. apply to own situation |
| | 2g. sustain discussion | 2g. stick to the point |
| | 2h. keep stimulating | 2h. do follow-up thinking |
| | 2i. support members | |

Each element of the course should be listed separately, including such "incidentals" as handouts and displays. Simply listing, of course, will not supplant actual experience. But it will give you a head start on realizing the significance of your role as a student, as well as uncovering some of the unknowns of a new experience.

The teacher participants in our Institute this past summer tried a similar approach to understanding their roles as learners in what was, for most, a new situation. They began by describing their goals for children, as learners, within their own classroom. To the right of the list of goals, they made a list describing responsibilities of the teacher's role implied by the goals; to the left they made a list describing implied responsibilities of the child's role. Throughout their discussion, the teachers referred to their situation as learners in the Institute to find similarities between (1) their roles as learners and the role of the child in their classrooms, (2) our roles as instructors and their roles as classroom teachers, (3) the Institute goals and their own classroom goals.

These are forms of consciousness-raising. The lists are not in themselves important; it's the heightened awareness that results from brainstorming a list. Taking direct action on your role as a learner is hard to do unless you have first engaged in some form of reflection on your situation as both learner and teacher.

Providing feedback to the instructor is a very important way to act upon your role as a student. Early feedback is especially crucial. I had a student tell me, three weeks before a course ended, that the reading had been totally meaningless to her. The feedback was important--she might have substituted other reading, for example--but the timing robbed it of a number of possible solutions.

The most constructive feedback an instructor can get pertains to how much and how well a student is learning. Usually course evaluations are designed to draw that out. On the other hand, evaluations are likely to be anonymous, so the instructor typically ends up with only a global picture of course effectiveness and direction. If you have an individual need, express it individually. "I want to know more about questioning techniques" and "I'm not learning what I set out to learn" are personal needs that should be individually expressed.

The more accurately you can define your needs, the more readily the instructor can provide some help. One of my students insisted he was getting nothing out of the math course because he'd "already read Piaget," because every other course he'd had also required sharing (and he'd been totally bored each time), and because the course wasn't telling him "how to do it" in his classroom. A more accurate definition of his needs might have been for him to list specific questions he was wrestling with, and specific needs he wanted the course to help meet, as well as to decide where in his classroom situation he'd like to begin "to do it." I realized--regrettably, too late--that some information from me on the role of the student could have helped him get a handle on his problem.

In addition to providing feedback on what is happening, feel free to suggest alternatives that might be more meaningful--both to you and others. The best way to decide if a suggestion is meaningful is to decenter--to take into account how it may affect the other

students and the instructor. Will your proposal help, hinder, or have no impact on how much and how well others are learning? Will it preserve the continuity of ideas that have been woven through the course so far, the quality of interaction that has been established, and the agreed-upon goals for the course? Will it strengthen the instructor's role of helping people learn? These questions may not be possible to answer prior to actually trying out a change, but having them in mind can still be a useful guide for making suggestions.

When students in my math course last semester were experiencing some difficulty sustaining real involvement with materials for two hours of class time, I asked for their suggestions. One person suggested that I teach people how each material--Cuisenaire Rods, geoboards, unifix cubes, attribute pieces, and the like--was "supposed to be used." Another suggested that (1) I hand out the David Hawkins (1970) article "Messing About In Science" for people to read, (2) we have a class discussion on "messing about", (3) the class then try to apply some of the ideas from the article and group discussion on messing about to their own involvement with math materials, and (4) I should free myself from other teaching roles at that time (conferences, mini-workshops, etc.) to concentrate on floating around to ask questions and offer suggestions as people were working with materials. This series of four suggestions, taken together, represent a good example of decentering in making a proposal to improve a course.

All of these points rest on a key principle: everyone has to have an active commitment to making the course succeed. The instructor cannot be solely responsible for the quality of the experience. Quality comes from individual and collective contributions. One of the more important questions I've ever put on an evaluation form is the following: "In what ways have you contributed to the quality of the course experience (a) for yourself, (b) for others?" Most of us, as students, have never been asked to come to grips with that question, or the premise on which it rests.

One way of stating that premise is that "You get out of a course what you put into it," as one student quipped. I think that this axiom is "known," in the same way that the Golden Rule is known. It's familiar, often said, but hasn't really been internalized. It hasn't been put into action in day-to-day situations.

What you put into a course includes more than what you put into your own course project. It includes what you put into the quality of the learning, the quality of the classroom climate, the quality of human relations, the quality of personal growth. In the center of the Role Wheel is the responsibility to "participate fully--give to others of yourself."

What can you contribute that affects the quality? There are a number of things that come to my mind--actual materials and resources, questions, experiences, discoveries, talents and expertise, information about yourself, your interests and work in progress, an interest

in and appreciation for others and their work. But I'm only partially satisfied by those possibilities. Perhaps because they are the obvious contributions and I recognize that subtle ones may be even more important.

A subtle contribution to the quality of your own learning is to be able to get new meaning from familiar experiences. Suppose you have attended a workshop on Piaget's stages of cognitive development and you find that an instructor is going to talk about those stages in a class session. Why is this nevertheless an opportunity for new learning?

First of all, different people present a topic in different ways; they bring to the subject their own connections and personal elaborations. Secondly, hearing the same person present the same topic more than once does not necessarily mean they are presenting the same thing. Instructors may change their presentation each time, either because their understanding takes on new dimensions with time or because the context changes (e.g., from a workshop for preschool teachers, to an introduction to a course, to a presentation for a conference on open education, etc.). And finally, the time between your previous experience and the current situation enables you to bring new thoughts and experiences to bear on the topic.

The converse is also true--being able to find something familiar in new experiences contributes to the quality of your learning. If spending two hours constructing something with glue and wood scraps doesn't seem remotely related to your situation as a music teacher, for example, try to find some elements that the experience and your situation do have in common. It may be something as simple as relating your feelings about the task to feelings your children have had as learners, or something as complex as finding a way to use small construction to help children acquire some music-related insights.

Without these two efforts--to find new in the familiar and familiar in the new--the range of experiences from which you could learn would be tremendously narrowed. Put another way, the quality of your learning will be enhanced by broadening the range of situations from which you can learn.

Contributing to the quality of others' learning has two sides. One is to be a teacher in the best sense of the word--to share with others what you know, think, and have experienced, in a way that contributes to their growth and development. As a case in point, I've noticed that teachers who have been "doing open education" for quite a while have difficulty sharing their insights with other members of a course who have just begun to try it out. The difficulty comes, I think, from wanting to impose on others an approach that you find personally convincing, rather than to teach them--to offer questions and suggestions that could help others develop; that they find convincing.

The other side of the issue is to help others teach--to make the effort to reward someone else for their contributions. I once had a student who used every class session, no matter what the topic, as an occasion to relate his past experiences with the knowledge about the subject at hand. His constant "giving" was making the rest of the class very uncomfortable. I tried to help him see that this behavior left others with the feeling of not being able to contribute anything to his learning. Contributing to the quality of others' learning has to be balanced by a receptivity to and appreciation for what others can contribute to you.

And finally, fairness is a real, though subtle, contribution to the quality of a course experience. Fairness to the instructor and to yourself is a matter of keeping things in perspective. That may sound obvious and easy, but judging by some of the evaluation comments I've heard, it's easy to say but difficult to do. One person said that my math course had "too much lecture," whereas in fact I gave only one lecture during the 15 week course. A student in one of my colleague's courses complained that he "read from books" too much. He had done it twice during the course. "I wish you wouldn't change the assignments so much, " was another comment. The student making the comment had been absent form a session of the course in which the class had asked for clarification of an assignment, and they and the instructor had devised a mutually agreeable modification.

How long does it take to internalize the role of the student? I don't know. I do know it takes constant effort. What's the best way to begin? I'm not sure. Thoughtful student responses to this paper might be one way. I am sure that just being conscious of the significance of the role of the student will help us both--instructors and students.

Two occasions this past summer highlighted what a difference just being aware has made for me. One student had dominated a discussion of aesthetic education by talking about his personal interests and said to me afterward, "I tend to talk too much, so you'll have to shut me up." In the past I would have considered it my uncomfortable job to tell this person in all future sessions when I thought he was talking too much. Instead, I sought him out about an hour after he'd made the comment, and said, "Remember what you said to me about having to tell you when to shut up? Well, that's your job. It's part of your role as a student to work on that."

On another occasion I was walking down the corridor and asked a student as I passed, "Are you having a good day?" He replied, "Not so far." I started feeling badly about that, and then the role of the student flashed through my mind. I turned around to say to him before he disappeared down the corridor, "Make it happen, friend. Make it happen."

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